

Canadian National Railways and Air Canada

way" because the tower is economic idiocy. Of course, I am sure the tower will be a fine, a marvellous place, and I might have enough money one of these days to take my wife up there for dinner. But really, Sir, there is a place for the use of social capital. We have a housing problem. We need more serviced land. We have a transportation problem. We need more boxcars and a rationalization of our transportation system. But do we need to use public money to build what are clearly speculative ventures, that have nothing to do with transportation, and are just for the glory of the directors of the Canadian National?

I suggest it is time the government called on the railway to halt these ventures, and to perform its proper function in our society. It should not continue to get involved in one scheme after another. Remember, Sir, at one time this railroad had a bunch of steamships. It lost a fortune on them. Then, it got into the radio business, and later peddled that off to the CBC. Now, it is getting more into the hotel business. It lost money on almost every hotel it owned, yet it continues to build new hotels, while selling the old ones off so that someone like the promoter in Saskatoon will make a bundle, as he undoubtedly will through his purchase of the Bessborough Hotel.

It is a disgrace that I, as a member of the opposition, should have to present these amendments to the House. It is especially a disgrace that this bill should be back for debate today since less than a week and a half ago the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) declared that he could not control the railroads, that he wanted a full investigation into the way the railroads operated, and that he was disturbed about the lack of transportation planning in this country. That was a tremendous admission that the government has no policy in transportation, and clearly, Sir, it has no policy in connection with hurdy-gurdys in the sky, or in connection with hotels.

Why are we again being asked today to approve this bill without saying to the Canadian National Railways, "Fellows you have no right to continue to use the people of Canada as a well from which to grab more money for more of your grandiose schemes." Until it can operate transportation properly, until it can move freight and passengers, which is the prime duty of the railroad, then surely it has no right, no licence to come to this House and ask for money for schemes of dubious value, schemes that are not likely to assist in the transportation of people or goods, and schemes for which its management is inept, according to the history of the railroad in this class of activity ever since its inception.

The Minister of Finance should amend this bill and tell the Canadian National, "Here is enough money to carry on with track laying, and to provide the necessary additions to rolling stock that are required. We are going to have a full investigation into railroading, but here is the money in the meantime. But also in the meantime, just get out of a business you do not know the first thing about." "You are losing the people of Canada money on hotels. You are not making a profit. You are building fancy bedrooms and fancy lounges. That is not the business of Canadian National."

There is no excuse for this railway to be in the hotel business, to be building towers and the like, since its

[Mr. Blenkarn.]

management in past years has indicated how inept it is in looking after this class of business.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak on motions Nos. 1 and 2 pertaining to Bill C-5, and to deal not only with the financial aspects but also with the internal operations of Air Canada. An immediate investigation must be launched into the operations of Air Canada, especially at the Dorval base. It would seem that instead of spending money on towers and hotels we should be directing our efforts to improving our national transportation systems, including our national airline, Air Canada.

To say why there should be an investigation into Air Canada's operations may I point out that morale and safety are two of the company's major problems. I would like to quote from a recent publication of the airline's "Lodge News" as follows:

Unfortunately the shop stewards in customer service have to deal with first level Air Canada supervisors that are not interested in resolving grievances or applying the collective agreement. The supervisor's only concern is trying to run a schedule operation at all costs. The result of this attitude causes one of our largest problems and most frequent violation of the collective agreement, i.e. safety. The collective agreement is quite clear in that management is specifically charged with the duty of initiating and monitoring all practices necessary to ensure the safety and health of employees as well as ensuring the safety of all equipment.

Because of the attitude of first level supervision and their refusal to initiate safety, the shop committee is presently handling the problem at the second level of the grievance procedure which is the regional vice president or his designated representative.

I would like to give an example of what I am talking about in regard to air safety in Air Canada. Last Tuesday flight 531 out of Quebec was climbing at 14,000 feet. The plane lost cabin pressure. Masks were deployed, but only 40 per cent supplied oxygen. This is a condition that has been prevalent with Air Canada planes for some time. It is a matter which I brought up before the Standing Committee on Transportation last spring, and apparently nothing has been done about it. At that time I read this letter into the record:

On November 23, 1973, I boarded Air Canada's flight 280 to attend an archeological symposium at the University of Calgary. Within 20 minutes of take-off I experienced that sense of continuous "ear popping" (for want of a proper medical term). The aircraft became instantly chilled, and to my horror the oxygen cabinets opened and we were instructed to use the orange masks. You can well imagine the anxiety, especially among the more aged passengers. In addition, not all the masks produced oxygen. The man sitting next to me tried in vain to operate his, but without success.

As I say, I quoted this letter last spring, and apparently nothing has been done since. That is why I am calling for an investigation into the operations of Air Canada. I saw a recent news release which informed us that the vice president of maintenance for Air Canada is being replaced by an American who is being brought in to take over, so obviously there are problems at Dorval.

● (1640)

I brought another matter to the attention of Mr. Pratte last spring at transport committee meetings, and drew his attention to a document signed by eight Dorval employees. I should like to read this letter into the record as follows: